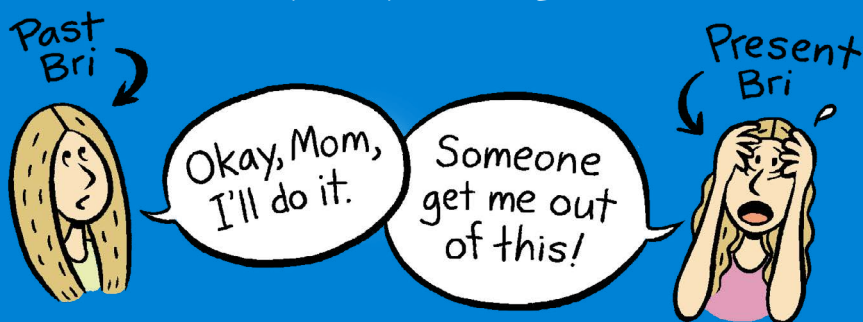


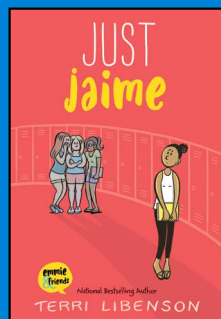
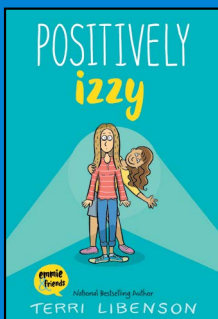
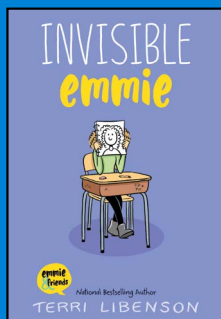
# MIDDLE SCHOOL

is full of challenges.



Everyone knows how much brainy Bri likes the spotlight (not). So why did she ever agree to something that forces her to learn a new language, give a speech, help organize a party, and juggle drama at school and home?! As the big event inches closer, Bri wonders if it's all worth it. . . .

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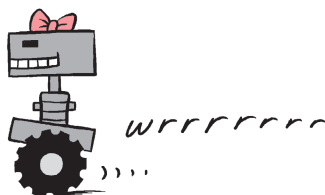
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# BECOMING brianna



TERRI LIBENSON

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Becoming Brianna

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[www.harpercollinschildrens.com](http://www.harpercollinschildrens.com)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019956234

ISBN 978-0-06-289454-0 (trade bdg.)

ISBN 978-0-06-289453-3 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-06-301814-3 (special edition)

ISBN 978-0-06-302664-3 (special edition)

ISBN 978-0-06-302571-4 (special edition)

ISBN 978-0-06-302903-3 (special edition)

ISBN 978-0-06-303973-5 (special edition)

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20 21 22 23 24 PC/LSCC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



First Edition

To the clergy and educators at Fairmount Temple, who helped  
shape my kids and gave them a home away from home







# PROLOGUE

Well, here I am again. How, how, how did I get myself into this TWICE?

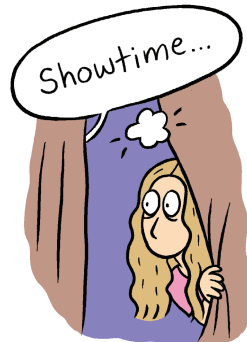
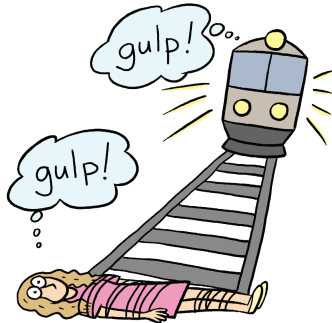


Maybe I'm a glutton for punishment. Or just a sucker. That last one probably nails it. Why else would I put myself in the spotlight again?



Peeking through the curtains, I see my parents and lots of friends. At least I have support.

Or witnesses for this train wreck.



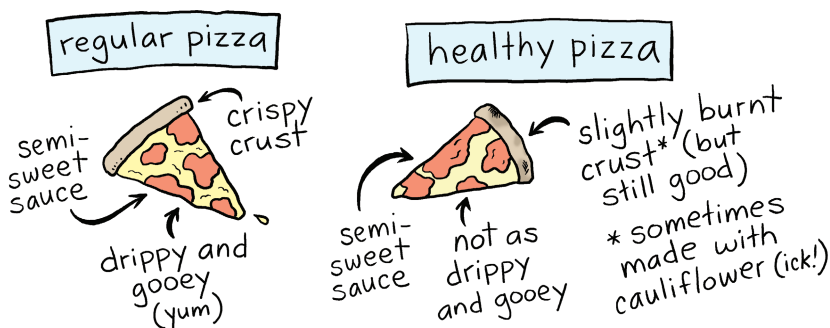
Okay, here I go. I hope I know my part well. I hope I don't screw up. I hope I don't trip on my face. I hope, I hope, I hope...



I hope I get this over with FAST.

# EIGHT MONTHS AGO

Mom and I are sitting at the kitchen table, shoving pizza in our faces. It's homemade pizza. Mom started making it from scratch when she realized it was just about the only thing I ever ate without complaining. Also, she figured it would be healthier.



It's not bad. I like Ramone's Pizza the best, but I've gotta hand it to Mom. She badgered the owner for the sauce recipe a thousand times until he finally gave in. Ramone made her swear she

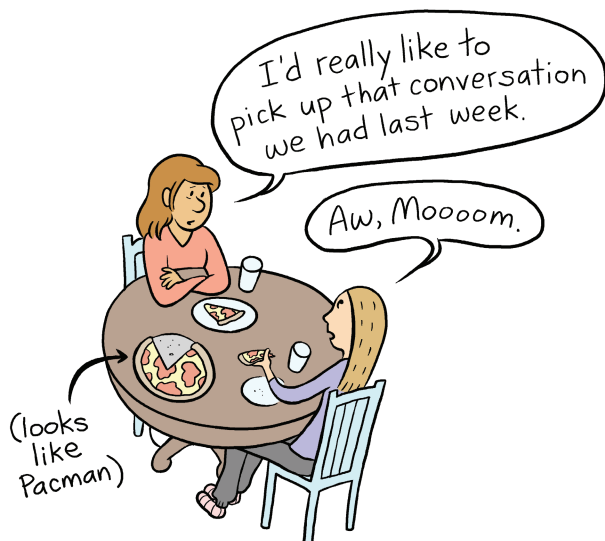
wouldn't give it away and would burn the photocopy of his handwritten recipe.

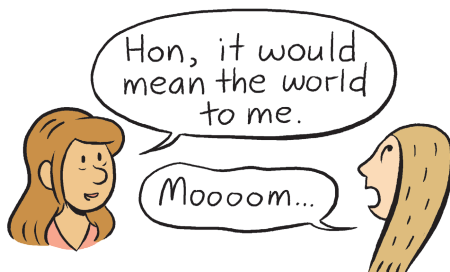
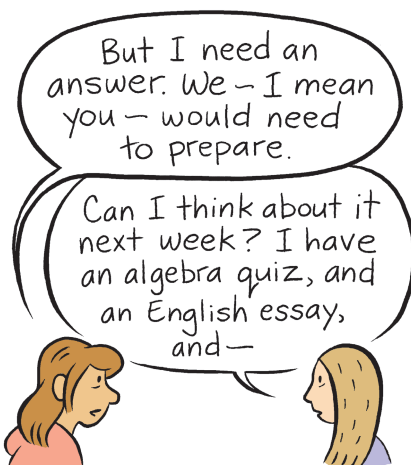


I'm at Mom's condo this week. My parents are divorced and share custody. They trade off weeks. It can be a pain going back and forth, but I'm pretty used to it.

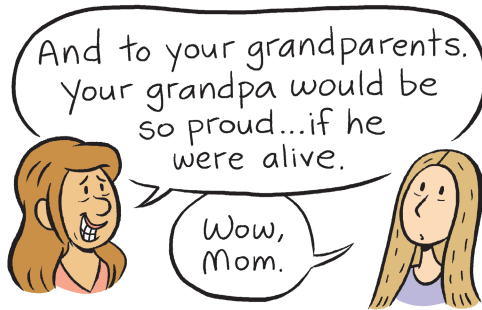


Anyway, here I sit, stuffing myself with pizza. At least, I try.

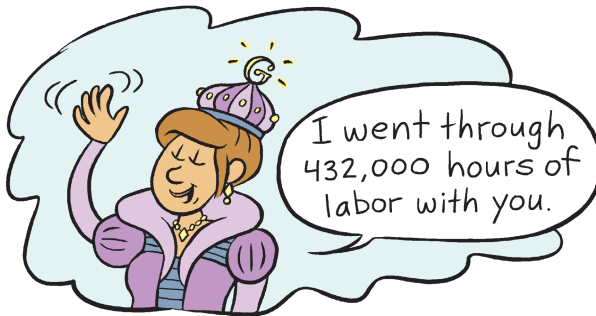


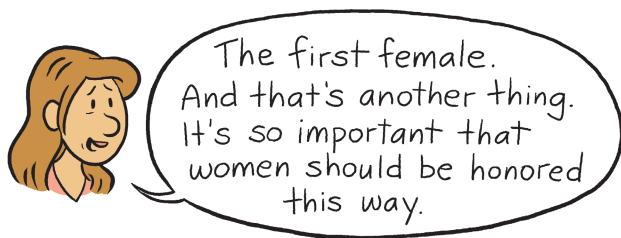




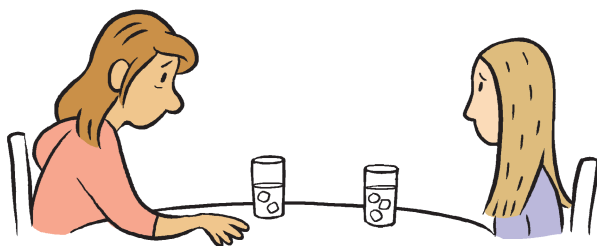


Did I mention she is the Queen of Guilt?





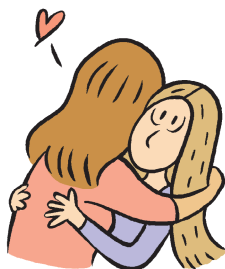
That is the **ultimate** guilt. Mom knows I've been a feminist since I was, like, five. She just touched a nerve.



So fast, I almost don't see her get up, Mom races over and engulfs me in a powerful hug.



What Mom doesn't know is that any time she says that . . .

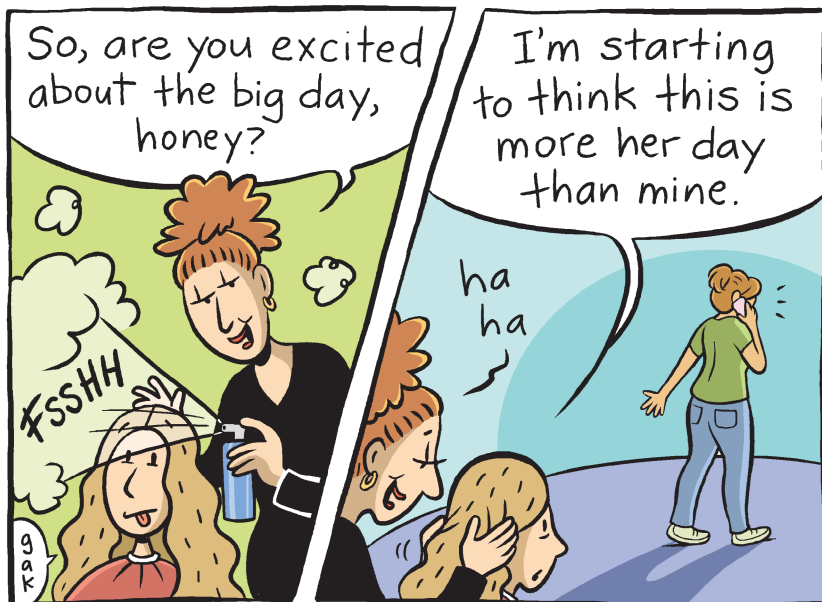


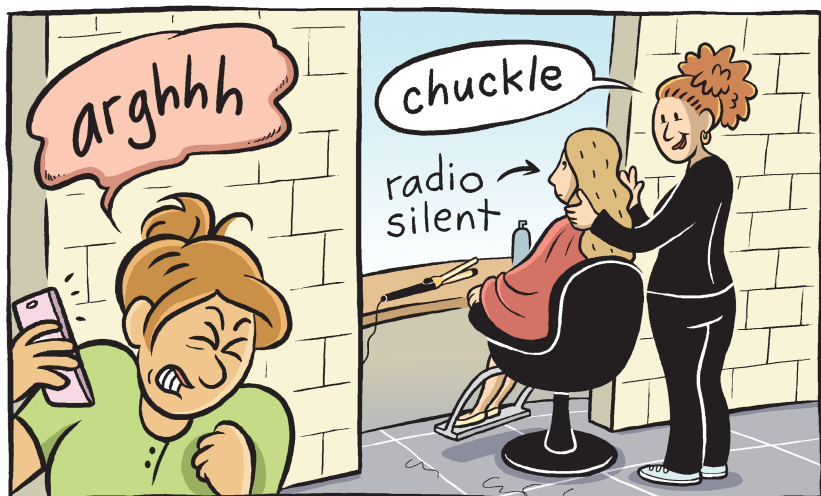
. . . I usually do.

NOW

WE'RE AT MOM'S REGULAR SALON.  
LAVEURNE IS DOING ME UP.







LAVEURNE FINISHES AND  
STEPS BACK.

How do you like it,  
honey? Waves okay?

Looks great.

sounds like ↗  
a squeak

And nails  
okay?

yes,  
thanks.

Can't they  
whip up  
something  
last minute,  
like hummus  
on toast?  
Or those  
avocado  
thingies?

SWOOP

MOM PAYS AND WE HEAD OUT.

Next victim!

click

It was just a snafu, but they're back on track.

PARKING  
←

You should see the flowers. Gorgeous. You'll look heavenly up there.





# EIGHT MONTHS AGO

So, by now you might be wondering what exactly I just agreed to. If you're twelve or thirteen years old and Jewish, you've probably guessed.



Yep, I just agreed to have a bat mitzvah.

Kids have bar or bat mitzvahs (“bar” for boys, “bat” for girls) around age thirteen (sometimes younger for girls ‘cause, you know, we’re mature and stuff). It marks a “coming of age” in Jewish tradition. The boy or girl leads the service—in Hebrew!—usually at a synagogue in front of family, friends, and even strangers (aka relatives you’ve never met).



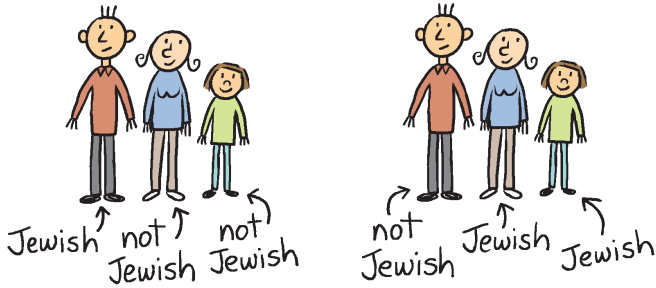
This is no little thing, believe me. You have to start preparing about six months ahead. Or longer, if you don't know Hebrew too well. Which I don't.



Here's the story. My mom is Jewish; my dad isn't. Traditionally, this means I'm considered Jewish. If it were reversed, I wouldn't be. Weird, considering the usual religious patriarchy\* thing.

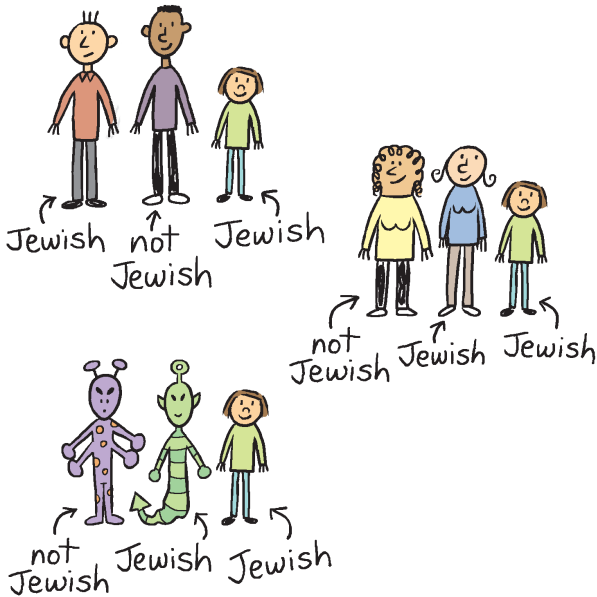
\*(men in charge, big surprise)

## Traditional view



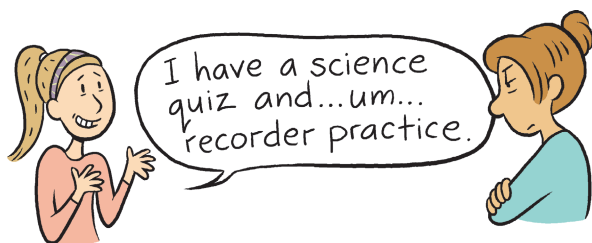
## Nontraditional view\*

\*(our temple, in a nutshell)

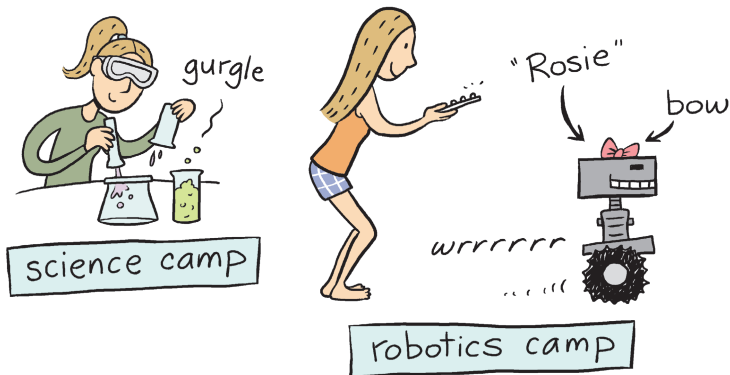


When I was growing up, Mom **encouraged** me to go to religious school (aka made me). That meant a couple weeknights and Sunday mornings. Because my studies came first, I didn't always have time to go.

And **maybe** I used that as an excuse once too often.



It's not that it was horrible. The teachers were nice, and they tried to make the lessons interesting, like with games and stuff. But most of the kids went to the local Jewish day camp during summers and were used to hanging out together. I didn't go to that camp, so I always felt a little left out.



Also, I was pretty bad at Hebrew.

I know what you're thinking: me, bad at a class? But languages aren't my thing. I'm not even that great at Spanish. I just study extra hard for it, and that's how I get As.

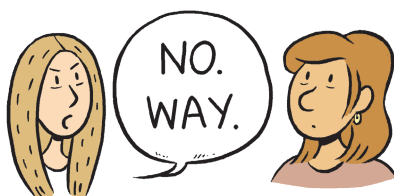


Anyway, I put my foot down and stopped going to religious school after fifth grade. I had way more important things to do, and I really wasn't that into it. Dad couldn't care less.

Mom agreed and seemed to stop pressing the issue.

But around September, she brought up the idea of a bat mitzvah.

At first, I was like:

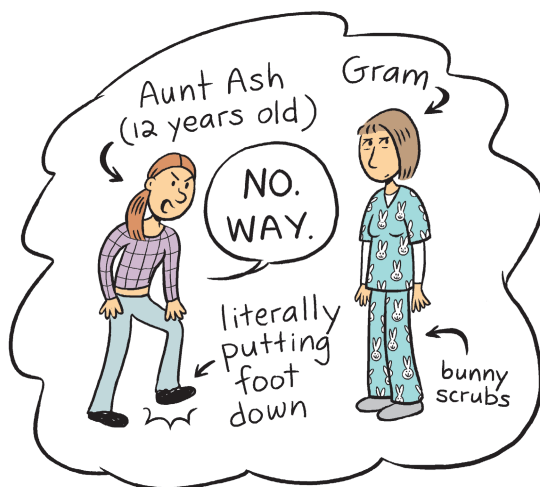


But she kept insisting. And insisting. And . . .



So here I am wondering—not for the first time—what I just got myself into.

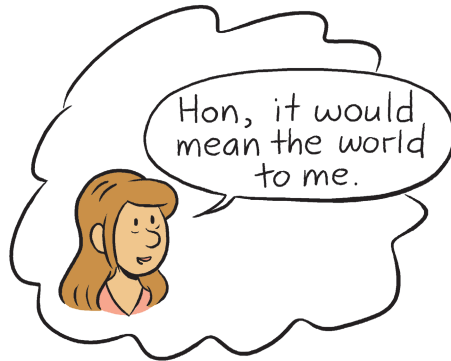
It's true. Mom was the first girl in her family to have a bat mitzvah. Her temple didn't allow 'em for girls until then. Even her older sister, my aunt Dani, didn't have one. (Her younger sister, my aunt Ashley, was just plain against it, for some reason.)



I know Mom just wants me to carry on the tradition she started. I can't really blame her. I'm her only child, so this is her one big chance.



I also know I'm doing this more for her than me.



But...

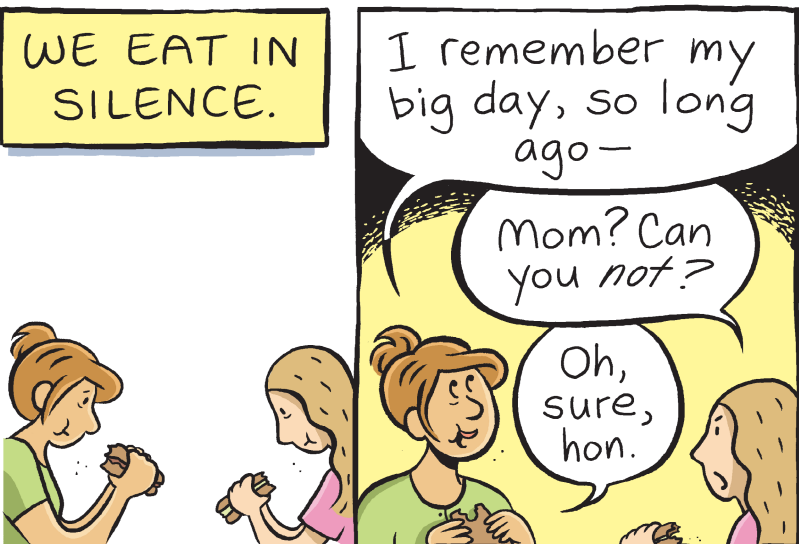
... I'm still trying to figure out why.

NOW

## GETTING A LATE LUNCH.



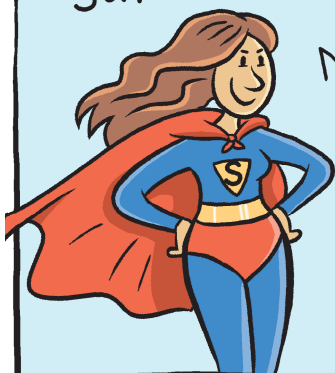
WE EAT IN SILENCE.





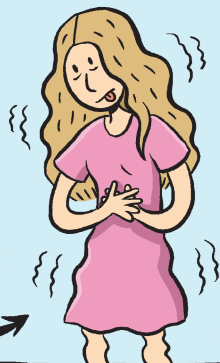
I FEEL BAD, BUT HONESTLY—  
IF EITHER OF US STARTS  
TALKING, I MIGHT EXPLODE.

SUPERWOMAN:



Nerves  
of  
Steel

ME:



Nerves  
of  
Silly Putty

WE FINISH UP AND GET GOING.



